

# The Bulletin

The Historical Society of  
Decatur County  
Greensburg, Indiana

## Editor's Note

The selections in this edition of the Bulletin are devoted to Spring and Summer-those seasons of the year when we, as well as nature, experience a renewal of change, hope, and purpose. Perhaps these lines by Robert Bridges (1876) and James Russell Lowell (1848) capture this spirit:

*Beneath the crisp and wintry carpet hid  
A million buds but stay their blossoming;  
And trustful birds have built their nests amid  
The shuddering boughs, and only wait to sing  
Till one soft shower from the south shall bid,  
And hither tempt the pilgrim steps of Spring.*

Bridges

*And what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then if ever come perfect days;  
Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays.*

Lowell



Decatur County has a long history of experiences-family oriented, work-related, and recreational-which are lived these two seasons of the year. Here are some of them.

## Summer Museum Exhibit

June 11<sup>th</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup>

### “Scrap Memorabilia”

This exhibit will feature scrapbooks, photo albums and autograph albums.

If you have any of these articles you would like to loan,  
please contact Ginny Garvey @ 663-2132.

Be sure to visit this exhibit!

*4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1837*

You wouldn't think accessioning materials at the museum could be so interesting, but it is. You never know what someone is going to give to the museum. We have just received a handwritten arithmetic/accounting workbook of Green Pleake's from 1839 given by Suzann McCoy, Van and Vivian Batterton's daughter. To make it even more interesting it is bound in feather ticking material and lined with a page from the Greensburg Repository and Advertiser of July 8, 1837. In it is a description of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations of 1837. The following is a transcription of the article.

Greensburg IA

Saturday, July, 8, 1837.

THE CELEBRATION!



The late anniversary of American Independence, was celebrated in our Village, just as it should be. None of that boisterous, bacchanalian ribaldry so often practiced on such occasions. At an early hour, the Students of the Seminary; a number of young person who had formerly been students, together with a large concourse of citizens, both from town and country, assembled at the Seminary. At ten o'clock a procession was formed, consisting first, of the female students, and those who had been students; second the male students, then the citizens, preceded by a band of music. The procession marched to the Presbyterian church, where the declaration of American Independence was read, and extracts from a number of eloquent and appropriate addresses, were recited by several of the larger students. - After which the procession returned to the Seminary and were dismissed.

Note:

The Seminary is the house on the southwest corner of the intersection of South Franklin and McKee Streets. It was built by Jacob Stewart in 1833/1834. In 1837 the Presbyterian Church was on the same site as the First Baptist Church is now (209 W. Washington St.) This church and the land was sold to the Baptists in 1846 and the building was destroyed by fire in 1854. A Presbyterian Church at 202 N. Franklin St. was begun in 1845. The present church was built in 1877/1878 and dedicated in 1881.

C. Mitchell

# The Return of the Fifth Sunday Musicals for 1926

ESTEVAN ALLEN  
Phone 4138-L

MARION ALLEN  
Phone 1189

## Allens' Amuse-U Park Greensburg, Indiana

### TO PARK GOERS AND DANCERS, GOLFERS AND SWIMMERS—

This is to let you know that ALLENS' Amuse-U-Park, Greensburg, Ind., one mile west of Greensburg, will have its second annual opening on May 30, 1926.

We want you to fall in line with friends and "meet up" our friends who are sure to be there to enjoy the great entertainment program of Zip, Pep, that both the old and the young enjoy.

So salute your partners and commence to begin to get ready to join in and jingle the joy bells, mingle with the merry makers and get happy.

We have connected ourselves with B. F. Keith's outdoor entertainers' circuit. There will be entertainments every Sunday afternoon and night which is free to every person who pays the small gate admission.

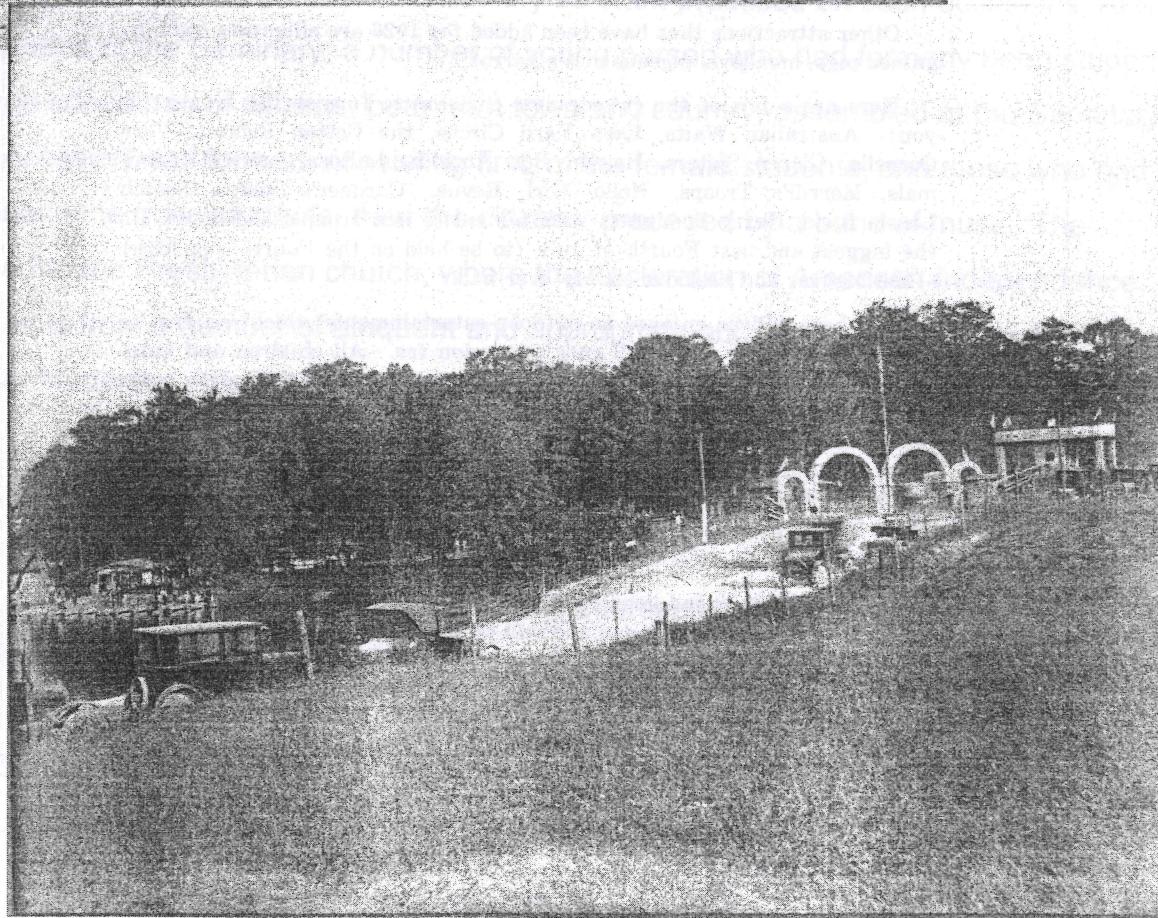
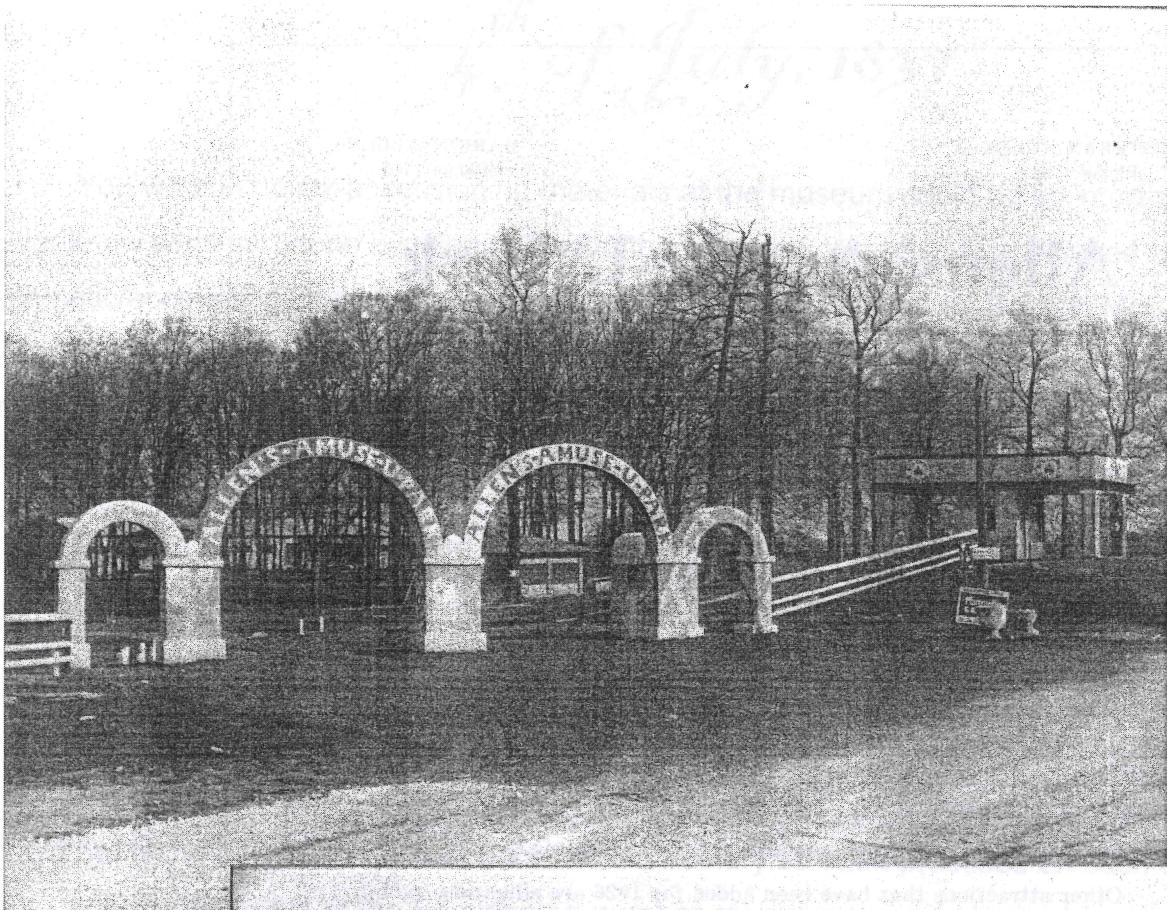
Also we are planning on one of the biggest and best Fourth of July that the park can have. Contracts are all signed.

Other attractions that have been added for 1926 are alligators, rabbits, guinea pigs, monkeys, pigeons and a parrot.

Here are a few of the entertainers that are to furnish the laughs for you: Australian Waits, Barn Yard Circus, the Cotton Pickers, Vern Cornell, Glenco Sisters, Hassen Ben Abriddz, LaRosa, Lamont's Animals, Merrill's Troops, Hello Girl Revue, Gardner's Rodeo, Scotch Lassie Band, Harry Snodgrass with his entire new troupe, and above all, the biggest and best Fourth of July (to be held on the Fourth and fifth) —the biggest and best our county ever had.

All these will be enjoyed as outdoor entertainments which are free to everyone who pays the small gate admission fee. All children and automobiles admitted free. In connection with all this we have fourteen boats on a lake which covers twenty-five acres of land, also have cottages for rent, tourist camp for the traveler with a small cost to cover conveniences; a golf link for the golfer; a graduated bathing beach for the bather; and one of the finest dance pavilions and floors in the state. There will be a dance in this pavilion every Thursday and Sunday night during the park season.

If you want to spend your vacation near the water and in the country, this is the place to go. We can and will try to please you.



## The Return of the *Fifth Sunday Musicals* for 2005

The Decatur County Historical Society announces the return of the popular *Fifth Sunday Musicals* on July 31 and October 30, and in lieu of the Museum Christmas Open House, December 11. All performances will be at 2:30 P.M. at the First Presbyterian Church, 202 N. Franklin. After each program refreshments will be served, and the audience will have a chance to meet the artists.

On July 31, the Mossburg Strings, comprised of the five oldest of nine children, will be present for a varied concert of classical, country "fiddlin," "goodies but oldies," and Christian music. The group has won a number of awards, scholarships, and honors.

Our second offering in the series will be the Greensburg Junior High musical ensemble under the direction of Mr. Nick Parcell. These talented young people entertained the largest audience of the year in their premier Fifth Sunday appearance

in 2003. We will have a "hootin'" good time with the program, "Almost Halloween." We can expect spooky sounds along with a narration of Washington Irving's, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," by Russell Wilhoit.

Third on the list is a program by Pat Hicks, one of the nation's few remaining concert harpists. This presentation replaces the annual museum open house. Ms. Hicks' program is still being arranged, but it will include some incidental "holly day" offerings and, hopefully, a carol sing.

The sponsors of the Fifth Sunday Musicals are greatly appreciated. For the 2005 series of programs, the sponsors are Mary and David Miers, The Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, the Greensburg Daily News, 1<sup>st</sup> Federal Savings and Loan, and WTRE radio. As noted above, the Museum Volunteers will provide refreshments which will include the traditional seasonal fare along with a special treat, Mrs. Pikes' Bread Pudding. An opportunity will be available to visit with Ms. Hicks as well. Further details will be found in the Winter issue of the Bulletin, which will be out about the middle of November.

## The Return of the Fifth Sunday Musicals for 2002

Although there is no charge for the Fifth Sunday Musicals, we will appreciate your consideration of a donation for each event to offset the cost of incidental items such as postage, stationery, paper goods, and other items associated with the programs. Thank you, and please enjoy FIFTH SUNDAY MUSICALS!

The Fifth Sunday Musical Committee

All Musicals are being offered free to the community with an appreciation donation being taken.

Call Helen Hamilton at 663-8323 for further information.



**Sponsor \$150.00 ( ) Co-Sponsor \$75.00 ( ) Patron \$50.00 ( )**

**Make check payable to: Decatur County Historical Society**

**Mail to attention:**

**“Fifth Sunday”**

**P.O. Box 163**

**Greensburg, IN 47240**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_**

June 3, 2005

Dear Members of the Historical Society of Decatur County,

It has been a great pleasure to work with the Building Committee in planning the addition to the Decatur County Historical Society Museum. All the members have contributed to developing the program; a high-ceilinged gallery, a meeting room and office/archive, and increased storage and costume maintenance areas. An elevator and fire stairs will enhance accessibility to the entire structure.

We have completed the Architectural Drawings and Specifications and look forward to breaking ground this summer.

I appreciated meeting so many Historical Society members at the Annual Meeting and thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Thomas Gordon Smith, AIA  
Thomas Gordon Smith Architects  
2025 Edison Road  
South Bend IN 46637  
Tel: 574-287-1498  
E-mail: archtgs@aol.com

## GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY

### July 4, 2005, at 11:00 a.m.

Dear Members:

It is with great pleasure that, after several years of work, a date has been set to break ground for the addition to the historic home that we call the Historical Society of Decatur County.

Several years ago, an anonymous and generous donor left the Museum a sum of money with no restrictions. After many months of thought, the Board of Directors determined that the best use of a portion of our inheritance would be to build an addition. For years we have needed extra storage, (as we had artifacts stored in several locations in the community), an office for our archivists to work, and a gallery to display our many items of historical significance.

A small committee was formed to search for an architect that could help take our dreams to reality. A key person on this committee was Terri Ann Blanton, as she worked tirelessly to find the three best firms for our project. After interviewing three architectural firms, we engaged Thomas Gordon Smith Architects of South Bend, a highly regarded and nationally known architect.

President Diana Springmier appointed a building committee consisting of herself, David Miers, Katherine Bailey, Russell Wilhiot, Tom Barker and Charity Mitchell. For the last year they have met with Mr. Smith to develop the plans for the Visitor Center (a floor plan is included in the bulletin). Also during this year, we hired Bruns & Gutzwiller of Batesville, Indiana, to be the general contractor. Every effort has been made to retain the historical integrity of the site.

After enjoying the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, please join us behind the museum to celebrate this historic moment.

David L. Miers  
President

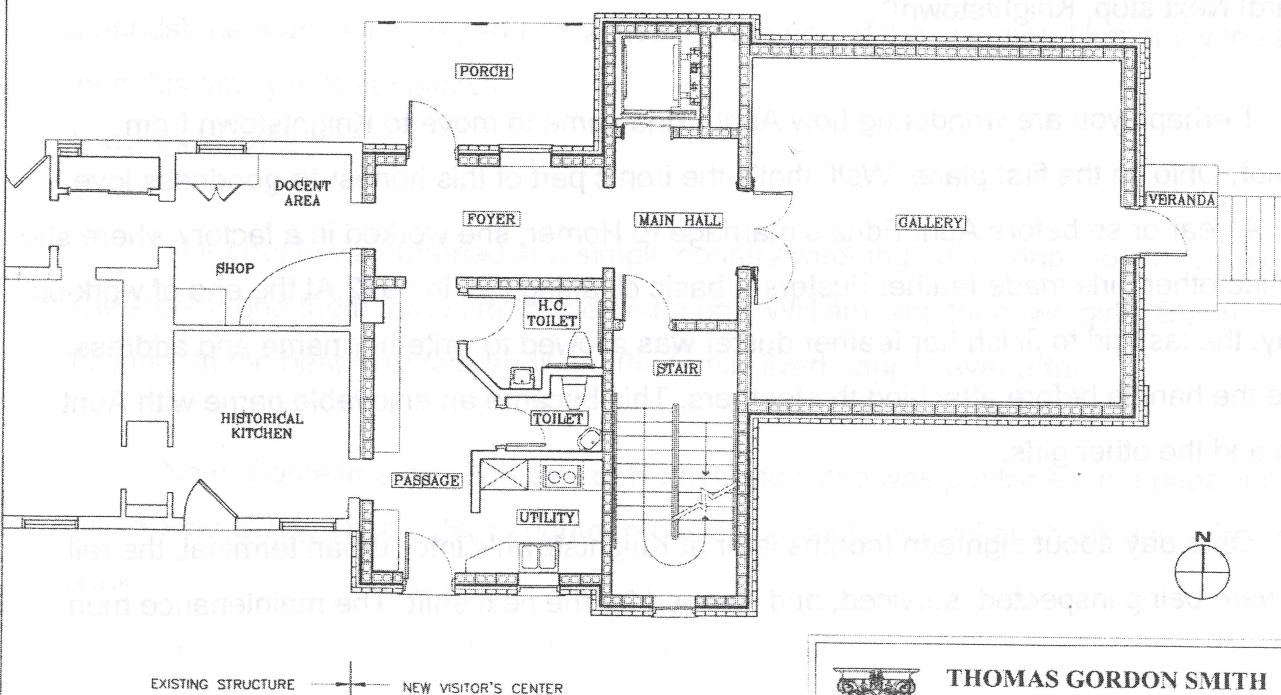
## Back to the Bridge!

On Sunday, August 21 at 2:00 P.M., the Historical Society will once again convene at the Westport covered bridge to observe the significance of this historic structure. After the meeting, home-made ice cream will be served at the home of Bob and Jean Conwell. Please make plans now to have a good time at the BRIDGE!

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We can use several volunteers to help with the restoration project at the museum. We need to get ready for the contractors by moving museum displays and storing furniture and larger items. Please call the museum or one of the officers if you can help in any way. Also, don't forget the post-construction clean-up and preparation of the museum for its grand re-opening!

### THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DECATUR COUNTY VISITOR'S CENTER



THOMAS GORDON SMITH  
ARCHITECTS  
2025 EDISON ROAD · SOUTH BEND, IN 46637  
TEL. 574.287.1498 · FAX 574.287.0821

# *A Real Love Story*



by reed schuster

I'm about to tell you a real love story-a fairy tale story, and it's true. It may seem a little disconnected, but please bear with me.

When my mother, Lottie, was a little girl, perhaps ten years old, her oldest sister married and moved to Knightstown, Indiana. My mother spent the summer vacations with her sister Edna and her husband, Homer. The train from Cincinnati to Knightstown stopped at Greensburg. My mother said that the conductor, after calling the station, would invite all the passengers to see the world's only place with a tree growing from the courthouse tower. Then the train whistle would blow, the bell would ring, and the conductor would call out, "All aboard! Next stop, Knightstown!"

Perhaps you are wondering how Aunt Edna came to move to Knightstown from Cheviot, Ohio, in the first place. Well, that's the ironic part of this honest-to-goodness love story. A year or so before Aunt Edna's marriage to Homer, she worked in a factory where she and nine other girls made feather dusters-a basic cleaning tool in 1912. At the end of work on Friday, the last girl to finish her feather duster was allowed to write her name and address inside the handle before attaching the feathers. This became an enjoyable game with Aunt Edna and the other girls.

On a day about eighteen months later at Knightstown's inter-urban terminal, the rail cars were being inspected, serviced, and cleaned for the next shift. The maintenance men

left their brooms, cleaning cloths, and one particular feather duster behind. This feather duster, well-worn, lost its feathers, and Homer, whose turn it was to use the feather duster was left holding only the handle. A tiny slip of paper fell out of the handle and fell at Homer's feet.

The other men of the crew saw the paper fall, but Homer was the one who picked it up. He unfolded it and read: "Edna Picker, 1212 Lovel Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio." A member of the crew noted, "You're the only one of us who isn't married...you write to her." Homer's boss said, "She might be just what you need-a wife." Knowing my uncle Homer, I'm sure he got red in the face. But, as the story goes, my uncle folded up the paper, put it in his shirt pocket, finished his work, and went home.

Sure enough, one Fall day Edna received a letter with a return address of Homer Miller, R.R 37, Box 207, Knightstown, Indiana. Edna did not answer the letter, but she did take it to work to show the other girls, and they encouraged her to respond. Edna was pretty, single, and young, with long dark hair, brown eyes, and a smile a mile wide. She answered the letter!

Of course more letters followed, and Homer even visited Edna to meet her family. He was a handsome man, tall, dark, and attractive. By the end of the summer, Homer invited Edna to meet his family in Knightstown.

They fell in love!

The couple was married in a simple country wedding, and Edna moved to Knightstown. The stork found them three times: the first a boy, William, and then two girls, Dolores and Yvonne. In the best fairy-tale tradition, the family lived happily ever after.

Note: Sometime later this tale of Homer and Edna was published in a paper-back book called *True Story*. Their older daughter received a twenty-five dollar check and a free copy of the book.

Historical Society of Decatur County  
P.O. Box 163  
Greensburg, IN 47240

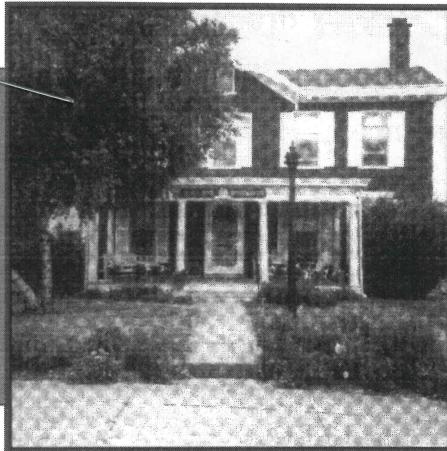
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Charity Mitchell  
234 S. Franklin St.  
Greensburg, IN 47240

# The Bulletin

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# The Bulletin

The Historical Society of  
Decatur County  
Greensburg, Indiana

## President's Message

My president's messages over the next year will primarily consist of updating you, the membership, of the progress and status of our new addition.

Early in July we had a ground breaking for the new structure scheduled, but it was postponed. I would like to explain to everyone why that happened. At the time of the scheduling we had not received the final figure of what the project would cost. When we received those figures your board of directors felt that we would be spending more of the generous gift we had been given than we had anticipated. We wanted to retain more of the gift for the future of the society using the growth of that gift for future boards to have resources, if needed, for the maintenance and operations of the society.

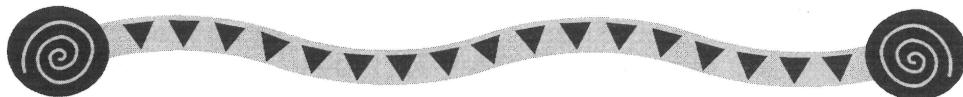
With that in mind, we asked the architect to return to the "drawing board" to see if he could find some cost savings in the building. In a week's time he came back with a proposal that did just that. By eliminating the basement there would a substantial savings. What was to be in the basement was moved to the first floor, and what was to be on the first floor moved to the second floor. The only loss to the project was storage space in the attic. This change lowered the cost of the building by 14%. At the August 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the board these changes were presented and accepted.

On August 12, as your building committee chairman, I met with Thomas Gordon Smith, our architect, Jim Bruns of Bruns & Gutzwiller, the general contractor, and all the sub contractors that would be working on our project to discuss and coordinate the construction. Everyone there worked very closely and made some minor changes that would benefit each other. There was a great deal of cooperation amongst everyone. Bruns & Gutzwiller should be complimented for bringing together a group of high quality "subs" to work with them to construct our addition.

We also must compliment Thomas Gordon Smith and his staff for their ability to make changes to the building in a very short period of time, thereby saving us money.

For those of you that attended the July Fifth Sunday Musical at the First Presbyterian Church with the Mossburg Strings enjoyed a wonderful concert. So good in fact, that we have already spoken to them to return for the 2007 season. Be sure and mark October 30<sup>th</sup> on your calendar for the next Fifth Sunday Concert. Behind every successful event there is usually one person who makes it a success and reed Schuster is that person for our Fifth Sunday Concerts. Thank you, reed.

I look forward to bring you the exciting news for our construction project in future bulletins. This is a very exciting time in the life of our society.



### Something to think about...

A commentary entitled *Cultures Aren't Equal* by Michael Bourne in the August 15<sup>th</sup> issue of *U.S. News and World Report* contains this quotation attributed to Jean Francois Revel: "A civilization that feels guilty for everything it is and does will lack the energy and conviction to defend itself." Does this speak for our nation today?

## Fifth Sunday Musicals 2005

The great clock on the Decatur County Courthouse struck 2:30 p.m. while at the First Presbyterian Church, David Miers, President of the board of the Historical Society of Decatur County, welcomed an audience of two-hundred music lovers to the biannual opening Fifth Sunday Musical of 2005.

The Mossberg Strings, five children from a family of nine, all of whom are violinists, presented a varied program from the classics to fiddlin'. A hush fell over the audience during Gounod's "Ave Maria" as the oldest Mossberg child/violinist, accompanied by his brother, the next in order, shared their musical gifts with those present who could have heard a pin drop.

At the reception to meet the artists following the program on heard "delightful, proficient, exceptional, wonderful and WOW!"

The two remaining Fifth Sunday Musicals, October 30<sup>th</sup> and December 11<sup>th</sup>, are both at the First Presbyterian Church at 2:30 p.m. The October 30<sup>th</sup> program will feature the Greensburg Junior high School Musical Ensemble, directed by Nick Parcell, with The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, narrated by Decatur County Historian, Russell Wilhoit. Cider and donuts will be served following this seasonal program.

The December 11<sup>th</sup> program is in lieu of the Museum's Annual open house. This seasonal offering brings Pat Hicks, harpist, with a beautiful Christmas presentation and the Batesville Middle School Eighth Grade Choir, directed by Cathy Zwink. Gladys Pike will serve her bread pudding as guests meet the artists.

The following folks make the Fifth Sunday Musicals possible as sponsors: First Federal Savings and Loan, Greensburg Daily News, Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, David and Mary Miers, Joe and Susan Rust, GECOM, Hilliard- Lyons. Co-sponsors are: LoBill Foods, WTRE 1330 AM, Levenstein's /Abbey Carpet, K-B Foods, Tri Kappa Omega Chapter, Tree County Players, and Home Federal. Patrons for the series are: Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Corya, Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Westhafer. Underwriters are: Scheidler Brothers Decorating Service, Greensburg Optimist Club, HOP Communications, and Brunni Corporation.

## Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, and Milford

Arthur Shumaker's *A History of Indiana Literature* describes Edward Eggleston as "...the man who began the Golden Age of Indiana literature with his publication of *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* in 1871. Eggleston, a native of Vevay, spent a considerable time in Decatur County where he resided with an uncle. It was this time in his life when he encountered, and gained, a fascination with the Hoosier back-country dialect which he incorporates in his novel. Interestingly, it was not until some twenty years later, that Mark Twain utilized realistic regional dialects in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

Eggleston's novel, set in the 1850's, depicts the trials, both educational and legal, of a young man who begins his teaching career as the only instructor in a one-room school in the Flat Creek district where "...it takes a right smart man to be school master...in the winter." Although the novel contains thirty-four chapters for a total of some 250 pages, only about a third of the book focuses on the educational theme. The rest of the plot involves the teacher, Ralph Hartsook, and the circumstances attendant to his trial brought on by a false accusation of thievery made by certain members of the "respectable" citizenry of Flat Creek. Not surprisingly, Harsook is an opportune target for such accusations because he is both "educated and a stranger." Justice prevails, however, and the teacher's vindication ironically comes about through the efforts of Bud Means who, at the beginning of the book, had vowed to "...take the starch out uv the stuck-up feller."

Although one of the most popular novels of the later Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, the work generated a great deal of controversy as to its setting, but Lewis Harding, in his 1915 edition of Harding's *History of Decatur County, Indiana*, sets the record straight. The locale of the story is the community of Milford, at one time called Clifty, in Clay Township. The setting is authenticated by Eggleston's account of the trial in which Hartsook is involved, because the events and names referred to in *Schoolmaster* are the ones similar to an actual trial in Milford in 1853 (Harding, *History of Decatur County*, Pages 503-507).

## Tales from the East and West Schools-Circa 1949-1957

*Nick Williams*

The classmates I went to school with at the East and West buildings between 1949 and 1957 were neither old or bald, but all fit one or both categories today. I would like to name all of them, but my old (older) teacher is limiting the number of words I may write. Rest assured I remember all of them, and if you wish not only to read their names but also "see" them, check the 1961 edition of *The Tower Tree* yearbook.

Our teachers at the East School were Mrs. Bolte, first grade; Mrs. Hodson and Mrs. Enos, second grade; Mrs. Mitchel, third grade; Mrs. Elston, fourth grade; Mrs. McCoy, fifth grade; and our cheerleader, coach, and mentor, Mr. Lehman for sixth grade, who also served as principal. Miss Frost taught us art, and Miss Taylor, who became Mrs. Childress, taught us music.

The first three grades and the nurse's office were on the first floor of the two-story red brick schoolhouse, which was situated where the present junior high school is located. If you went up the grand staircase, holding carefully to the highly polished, marine varnished bannister, you would reach the second floor where grades five and six were located. The principal's office was also located there. Regulator clocks, "almost finished" portraits of George Washington, forty-eight star American flags, and the "ABC's" were prominently displayed.

Corporal punishment was still, at times seemingly gleefully, administered, as was assignment to the "dunce" stool or isolation in the cloak room which was connected to each classroom. This punishment was usually reserved for those showoffs extraordinaire.

Great limestone arched windows displayed seasonal pumpkins, turkeys, Santa Clauses, or leprechauns. A less pleasant reality was the offensive odor of disinfectant, which lingered long after the "accident" which prompted its use. A cupola bell tower rose above the gabled roof of the school, daily calling the eager, and not so eager, with its persistent tolling.

Both the East and West buildings, wondrous structures in themselves, were heated by fire-belching monsters that ate large chunks of black coal and then spat out extremely sharp-edged cinders. These cinders were crushed and used like gravel to cover the black walkways around the schools. When finely crunched, the cinders were great for playing a game of marbles, but wicked to fall on when left in their "natural" state. Lots of not so young knees still carry scars from those wicked assailants. These cinders were also used to build the track at old Schriver Field. Yes, falling on them was brutal!

The front of the East School faced North Street, and a wide concrete walkway led up to granite steps and the entrance, where you would reach the first floor. Not immediately visible was the "lower" floor, which contained storage and janitorial rooms; that's also where the coal-eating monster lived, breathed, and spat out those "useful" cinders.

The grassy front yard of the East school was shaded by giant old trees. The back of the school, our playground, had swings, slides, a teeter-totter, a half-sized basketball court, and baseball/softball diamonds in the northeast and northwest Central Avenue corners. (Pardon this aside: One of my classmates, Bobby Wunker, was playing catcher during a softball game when he was accidentally hit in the head by a batter swinging at a pitch. Luckily, Bobby lived just across the street in the house now containing the school system's central office, so his mother was able to rush him to the hospital. The incident made for a great and heroic class picture!)

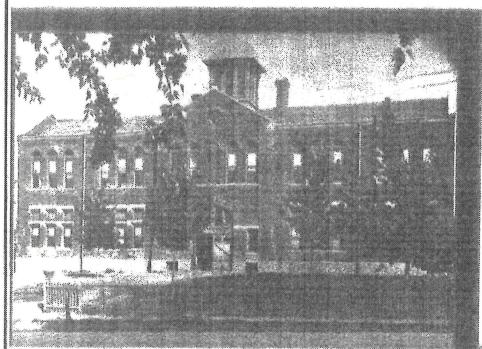
Every November 11 on what was then called Armistice Day, another of my classmates, Jimmy Joe Nelson, would proudly stand at the top of the grand staircase, and promptly at 11:00 A.M. play "Taps" on his cornet. Probably because we really didn't understand the significance, we teased Jimmy Joe all the rest of the day.

Mr. Lehman was, in our minds, a great athlete as well as an unchallenged scholar. He would even take off his shirt and play "shirts and skins" basketball at recess. Since we knew he was both fair and impartial, we always expected him to umpire our baseball and softball games. Those of us who were lucky enough to be traffic patrol members were treated to a day at Riverside Amusement Park in Indianapolis before the end of school in May. The expected adventures, and misadventures, of the trip are still fresh in my memory.

The West School contained elementary grades 1-6, but since I didn't go there until seventh grade, I will mention only those teachers I had during my seventh and eighth grade years. Our math teacher was Mr. Boicourt, who every day would ask, "Did you wash out your eyes this morning?" Hearing the obligatory "Yes," from the entire class, Mr. Boicourt would then deliver the punch line. "How did you get them back in?" Other teachers I had were Miss Bird and Mrs. Welch for English, Mr. Keene and Mr. Tower for science, and Mr. Granholt for U.S. History. We also had a substitute teacher, Mrs. Tetrick, for English. Our principal was Mr. Garner, and Mrs. Horton was the office secretary. I remember that Mr. Keene, known for the liberal use of the paddle, called everyone, including the boys, "Honey." Needless to say, this didn't set well with guys in 1956. On our first day of school, Mr. Granholt, the proud owner of a 1957 Plymouth Fury, recited (he couldn't and can't sing) Elvis Pressley's just released, "Hound Dog." I guess he had a reason, but I still don't know what it was.

One final note: On the fourth floor of the West School was a "museum," but we weren't allowed up there because the area was "condemned." Nobody seemed to worry about the floors below!

#### East End School



#### West End School



## Biographical Sketches

This is the first of a series of biographical and family sketches of people of Decatur County. So that the whole of the history of Decatur County will be covered, the individual issues have been divided into four chronological parts. The first issue of the year will cover the period from 1821 to 1849, the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue, 1850-1899, the 3<sup>rd</sup> issue, 1900-1949, and the 4<sup>th</sup> issue, 1950-1999. If anyone would like to contribute a sketch about a person or family, the bulletin will print them in the appropriate time period. Please send your sketches to George Granholt, 803 Park Road, Greensburg, IN 47240 ([gholt2@core.com](mailto:gholt2@core.com)) or Charity Mitchell, 234 S. Franklin Street, Greensburg, IN 47240 ([cmitc00@hsonline.net](mailto:cmitc00@hsonline.net)). Typescript or legible handwriting is fine; we will transfer it to electronic format.

This first sketch is about James B. Lathrop who lived from 1825 to 1929. His life covered more changes than most people living at the end of the twentieth century have seen as his life stretched from the pioneer days to the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. He was aware of or involved in the major political events of the time including the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and World War I. He saw the development of the state of Indiana and the rise of farms and towns out of the wilderness. Locally he was involved in the development of Decatur County and the city of Greensburg. He saw for himself the construction of most of the buildings on the Greensburg square in the 1880's and 1890's. He had also seen the first buildings as well which were largely gone by 1900. He was in or around Greensburg when both the old courthouse of the 1820's and the new courthouse of the 1860's were built. The technological changes he observed were amazing from a wilderness to a twentieth century with electrical appliances and lighting, telephones, telegraphs, roads, railroads, automobiles, etc. When his grandfather, Erastus, moved back to the U.S. from Canada to Vermont around 1810, he traveled by river, horseback, and foot. James would have traveled the same route by rail in much more comfort in 1929. In James Lathrop's reminiscences published in the Bulletin in 1979, he remembered the first Hendricks House on East Central Ave. (or the Fort Wayne Road), the hotel (Hendrick's Tavern) where the DeArmond Hotel stood and the horses being led down to Gas Creek to have the mud washed off them, and the driver of the mail from Lawrenceburg announcing his arrival once or twice a week with a bugle.

James Lathrop was born Nov. 24, 1825 in a small brick house built by his father, Ezra Lathrop, at 223 E. Washington St. on the site where doctors Weimer, Weigel, and Lecher have their offices. This building was constructed for Doctor Childress in 1955. James was one of six children of Ezra Lathrop (1803-1894) and Abi Potter (1804-1877). He and his brother Levi were the only ones of the six to reach adulthood. His grandfather, Erastus Lathrop, purchased his land July 20, 1821. He died before he could settle and his son Ezra (James' father) and other members of the family moved to Decatur County in 1822 to take up this land which consisted of 160 acres adjoining Greensburg (now a part of the town, east of Lincoln St. and north of Main St.) and 160 more north of the site of Greensburg. Ezra became a contractor and built many of the early brick buildings in Greensburg. During this time he also was a dry goods merchant and a money lender. He was also Justice of the Peace for twenty years. His son, James, attended schools in Greensburg and went to the Seminary on the corner of McKee and Franklin St. and to Indiana University.

In 1847 at the age of twenty-two he started his career as a pastor or circuit rider of the Methodist Episcopal Church for 31 years. He served as a minister in Martinsville, Greenville, Vincennes, Point Commerce, Franklin, Connersville, Vevay, Madison, Brookville, Columbus, Rushville, Aurora, and Adams. At one time he was in charge of Grace Episcopal Church in Indianapolis. He ended his career as a minister on the Milroy Circuit in 1877.

On the death of his brother, Levi, in 1884, he returned to Greensburg as a guardian to his brother's daughters and managed his father's business interests along with Lewis Lathrop from 1884. For five years between 1877 and 1882 he was the business manager of the Greensburg Woolen Mill Company. (The mill was located at the corner of Main St. and Lincoln. Ezra turned the estate of \$100,000 over to his children at this time. From the 1880's until 1929 he was greatly involved in the economic life of Decatur County being president of the Citizens Bank of Greensburg from 1895 to 1917. Politically he was a Republican. He remained active in

Methodist Church for the rest of his life and was involved with the Masonic Lodge from 1851 until he died.

On November 11, 1846, he married Mary C. Butler of Bloomington. They had four children: Mrs. John (Margaret) Shannon, Harry Lathrop (d. 1919), Mrs. Frank Gavin (d. 1924), and Miss Lizzie Lathrop (d. 1924). Jimmy Shannon of Florida is the great grandson of James Lathrop.

By the time he died in 1929 he was the oldest living M.E. Minister (1847-1929), I.U. graduate (1847-1929), Mason, 1851-1929, Knight Templar, 1856-1929, Bank president. In 1900 he owned 772 acres of land in Decatur and Rush Counties and property in Greensburg. His grandfather Erastus, and later his father, Ezra and his brothers and sisters originally owned the property where the Historical Society Museum at 222 N. Franklin St. stands. They sold or traded the property to Martin Jameson, a lawyer and mercantile man, who died in 1841. The house or part of it was built ca. 1846 and served as the rectory for the Presbyterian Church from 1847 to 1850 and was lived in by Rev. Montfort. The Lathrop's bought the house in the 1870's and remodeled the house. From 1897 when Mrs. James Lathrop died until 1924 it was lived in by James Lathrop and his daughter Lizzie. His daughter, Margaret, and her husband, John Shannon moved in to care for him in 1924 after Lizzie Lathrop died.

He lived a long and productive life and was well remembered by the members of the community. It is a good epitaph.

#### Sources

Atlas of Decatur County, 1882

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A genealogical and biographical record of Decatur County, Indiana. Chicago, Ill. : Lewis Publishing Co., 1900. Greensburg Daily News, June 7, 1929. Obituary.

Harding, L. (1915) A history of Decatur County Indiana. Indianapolis, Ind. : Bowen.

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Biographical sketch by Charity Mitchell

#### Museum Musings

The museum has a request of your membership. Volunteer help is needed to organize and index present archives, scrapbooks and photo albums. This is a sit-at-the-dining-room-table job at the museum. If you wish to help, please call the museum.

Even though this may seem premature, planning for Christmas is around the corner. A membership to the Historical society of Decatur County could be an interesting and reasonable gift to give a family member or friend.

After the annex is built, two bedrooms in the museum will be used as rooms which represent the 1860's to the early 1920's. These rooms, one a child's room/toy room and the other a bedroom will need to be furnished. If you have any heirlooms or know of a source please contact the museum. The office will need good file cabinets also.

Questions about the Society or Museum can be e-mailed to [dechissoc@core.com](mailto:dechissoc@core.com). One can also call the museum 812-663-2764. Leave a message and your call will be returned. If you have a question on local history or genealogy contact County Historian, Russell Wilhoit, e-mail: [rwilhoit@hsonline.net](mailto:rwilhoit@hsonline.net)

## Picturesque Little Milford

Milford, Ind., Sept. 24, 1936 - The little town of Milford is not on a railroad, but "she's sure down on the map," and her name is a familiar one, not only throughout the United States of America, but almost throughout the entire world, and all on account of that famous and idly read book, "The Hoosier School Master," written by Edward Eggleston, and the characters of the story being located in Milford and vicinity, but too fresh in the memory of all the News readers is the famous story to receive other than this brief mention here and now.

Milford is one among the oldest town in the state, being one-hundred and seventy years of age the 25<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2005, for it was on that day and date in the year of 1835 that James Edwards, "laid it out."

The same gentleman operated a grist mill and woolen factory in Milford in 1836, and the machinery of the mill was run by water power, the water supply being furnished by the stream so familiar to all, "Clifty."

At that time there was no bridge spanning the classic waters of Clifty, and the people crossed the creek at a place near the mill called "Mill Ford," and from this the little town derived the name of Milford.

In 1839 the town was incorporated for school purposes, and as from that date on down to a few years since, some of our well known people figured conspicuously in the schools, we give below some facts we believe will interest the general public.

The early history of the schools is given the words of one of its pioneer teachers, W. H. Powner, and his words concerning the Milford schools are as follows:

"Milford had just been incorporated (1859), the school house was then next; school was taught only in the lower room; the upper room contained old church seats; the house stood out in the commons. I was employed for two and a half months at forty dollars per month; this was the length of the term of the free school. Before the year was out I was crowded with pupils and needed more room; but, there was no money in the treasury. I started out with a subscription list, and, to our surprise in one day I raised one hundred dollars, Ed Marshall heading the list with ten dollars. The school was a success. During the summer vacation, I provided better seats, fenced the lot, planted shade trees which make the school yard at Milford today one of the prettiest in the county. In September, school opened with two departments, both rooms full. Pupils for two or three miles around were transferred to the corporation."

This school, thus organized by Mr. Powner, was taught by him for several years, during nine months of the year—about three months public school and the remainder supported by subscription. In 1868, G. A. Bower was chosen principal, and had charge of the schools two years, when W. H. Powner again taught one year.

Prof. John H. Bobbitt was selected principal in 1871, and remained in charge of the school three years, giving the patrons and pupils of Milford schools as good a service as they ever had before or since. The primary teachers for those years were Miss Josie Barge, Miss Emaline Hedrick, and Miss Fannie Tucker. At this time the enrollment exceeded that of any previous year, and the necessity for a larger and better house, and the establishment of a third department became evident. L. H. Marshall succeeded Prof. Bobbitt as principal, and, with J. S. Ryan, taught one term. The term of 1875-76 was taught by George A. Bower and John S. Boothe. James H. Connelly and Miss Maggie Barger were employed in 1876, and remained two years.



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